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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8990

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 0158

RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000587

SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR INL/C AND AF/C
DS/IP/AF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2018

TAGS: KCOR FAIR CVIS CM

SUBJECT: ASTOUNDING CORRUPTION AT CAMEROON'S AIRPORT AGENCY

Classified By: Political Officer Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (U) This message contains an action request for INL/C.

¶2. (C) Summary: Roger Ntongo Onguene, the General Manager of Aeroports du Cameroun (ADC), the Cameroonian government agency charged with management of the nation's airports, has embezzled millions of dollars from the ADC's coffers, undercut the agency's effectiveness and engaged in ethnically-biased hiring practices, according to a document given to the Embassy by Amadou Ali, Cameroon's Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Justice. Ntongo has been rumored to be among the next tranche of public officials to be fired in the Government of Cameroon's (GRC) anti-corruption campaign dubbed "Operation Sparrowhawk" by the media, but has not yet been removed from his position. Even in the context of a government rife with malfeasance, Ntongo's corruption is breathtaking in its scope and brashness. End summary.

Corruption: A Full-Time Job

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¶3. (C) In a May meeting with Poloff, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Justice Amadou Ali, who has been at the leading edge of the GRC's anti-corruption law enforcement efforts, shared a two page document, apparently the summary of an investigation or audit, listing examples of Ntongo's corruption and mismanagement. Among some of the more remarkable allegations:

--for 4 years, Ntongo leased his personal vehicle (a 4-year old Toyota Camry) to the ADC for a daily fee of about \$600; in 2007, he then sold the vehicle to the ADC for about \$100,000; in 2005, he leased a truck to the ADC for three months at a cost of \$45,000

--contrary to GRC regulations, the ADC paid more than \$200,000 to cover two years of Ntongo's son's university fees in the UK;

--a 4WD vehicle purchased for \$120,000 for the Chairman of the ADC Board was given instead to the Mayor of Obala, Ntongo's hometown; the ADC continued to pay fuel and maintenance fees for the vehicle;

--the ADC paid about \$60,000 to pave the road leading to Ntongo's private residence;

--Ntongo terminated contracts with two companies who cleaned the airports under ADC; Ntongo then hired three companies that he owned, at contracts paying four times the previous rates (at monthly rates of about \$65,000); the equipment used by these two companies was purchased by the ADC for about \$700,000;

--of the personnel hired to ADC by Ntongo, 90% come from his

native Lekie Distract;

The Costs of This Corruption

¶4. (SBU) Although Central African Economic Community (CEMAC) regulations that were incorporated into Cameroonian law through a Presidential Decree make it illegal for anybody to have a monopoly in the aviation sector, ADC has enjoyed a monopolistic position in Cameroon, where airlines are obliged to pay ADC fees even for services that are not needed or never provided. According to a well-placed industry source, the ADC's fees are among the highest in the world, second only to Tokyo's, and with no value added; airlines are forced to hire sub-contractors to do the handling that ADC is paid to do. These exorbitant fees were factors in the recent failure of domestic airlines NACAM and Elysian Airlines and national flag carrier CAMAIR. There is currently no domestic air service in Cameroon, with CAMAIR formally closed and undergoing liquidation.

Comment: What Does it Take to Get Fired?

¶5. (C) Even in the Cameroonian context, where large-scale corruption is the norm, Ntongo's brazen fleecing of the ADC is startling. The ADC's effective monopoly has stunted the aviation sector in Cameroon and effectively killed Cameroon's domestic airlines. No amount of GRC investment or training from the USG or any other donor could possibly overcome the paralyzing effect of such intense corruption and mismanagement. Ntongo's case provides the evidence, if any more were needed, that corruption is inextricably linked to Cameroon's development challenges. The emergence of this document provides reason to believe that Ntongo will face justice, but the GRC's decision to allow him to continue running the ADC provides insight into Biya's management style and reason to question the rigor of his commitment to stamp out corruption in Cameroon. End comment.

Action Request for INL/C

¶6. (C) Post asks that INL/C place a p212f hit for Roger Ntongo Onguene (DOB 17-May-1959).
GARVEY